NEWS

Winchester schools ready for new academic year

NELL ESCOBAR COAKLEY | STAFF WRITER

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Winchester High School custodian Michael Wyman takes a break while getting the school ready for opening day, Sept. 5. WINCHESTER NEWS STAFF PHOTO/NELL ESCOBAR COAKLEY

As the last days of summer dwindle away, millions of families, educators and kids across the country are getting ready to head back to sch
Winchester, school officially opens Sept. 5.

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Superintendent of Schools Dr. Frank Hackett said Winchester will resume this year with 10 additional minutes being added to the school day, with 5 minutes at the beginning and 5 at the end.

Each day for the middle and high school will begin at 8:25 a.m. and end at 3:12 p.m. Grades K-5 will begin at 8:05 a.m. and run to 2:25 p.m. while Lynch students at Parkhurst will begin at 7:35 a.m. and end at 1:55 p.m. due to busing schedules.

He said one of the things the School Committee has been aware of for a while now is that Winchester's elementary school day is "quite a bit shorter" than those of surrounding communities. The change is the result of negotiations with the Winchester Education Association to add more seat time for students.

The Lynch School is on budget and on schedule for a fall 2025 opening. WINCHESTER NEWS PHOTO/FRANK SITEMAN

Hackett also said small modifications are still being made to the transportation schedule.

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“We’ll get some feedback and make adjustments,” Hackett said, of the busing. “It will take a few weeks to settle in.”

He admitted last year was difficult because of the Lynch School tier being added to the bus schedule. Additionally, bridge work and road closures hampered busing.

“It was a real challenge last year,” Hackett said. “But I feel more optimistic about this year.”

Hackett added routes have been sent out so families know pick up and drop off times. And unlike last year, he said the Lynch schedule is staying the same.

“We’re trying to be more efficient,” Hackett said. “Our first priority is always safety. We try to make sure that we drop off and pick up on the right side of the road so no kids cross the roads.”

Physical Plant

Custodians across the school system are busy cleaning up, polishing and readying schools for opening day. But there have been some other improvements to the physical plant across the district.

First, Hackett said, is the Lynch School project, which is ongoing.

“The work at the Lynch is going very well,” he said. “We’re on budget. We were unsure about the groundwork, you know when you find things you weren’t expecting, but we’re past that. We are on target for a September 2025 opening.”

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In June, the final steel beam was put in place as part of the structural framework. School officials are now looking at the fun stuff: classroom furniture, gym equipment and cafeteria tables, among other items.

A sign at the entrance to Winchester High School lets visitors know about security cameras on c
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Hackett said the School Department has also done quite a bit of work around security.

“We’ve installed cameras, with a focus on the middle and elementary schools,” he said. “That was a big piece of work for us.”

The additional security was paid for via the school rental accounts.

Hackett said the new system also allows any brand of camera to work with it.

“All the schools have cameras now, but they’re new cameras,” he said. “We have more to do, but we have to map out where the other cameras will go. We’re working with the Police Department so they know what the system is and can tap in in an emergency situation.”

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Hackett said when it was built, Winchester High School set the standard for the district when it came to security. Lynch, he said, is fully outfitted with cameras and that was one of the main reasons it was so important to standardize the entire system — so everything works smoothly together across all of the district’s schools.

There’s also been a few more things on this year’s work schedule: refacing and repairing columns at the McCall Middle School, upgrading new playgrounds at Lynch, adding a new play surface at Vinson-Owen, the funds of which passed through Town Meeting, and of course, the Winchester High School gym project, which also passed Town Meeting this past spring.

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"We're in a bit of a holding pattern there," Hackett said, of the gym project. "The bids have come in a bit higher than we hoped and we have to work our way through it. We'll be working with the town on the best next steps."

Volleyball players practice inside the WHS gym, which was scheduled for an upgrade. The project is now on hold after bids came in higher than expected. WINCHESTER NEWS STAFF PHOTO/NELL ESCOBAR COAKLEY

Staffing

There's been a reorganization of the central office, Hackett said, with the School Department moving its human resources officer to the business office, freeing up the previous person who handled HR for other duties.

Hackett said the School Committee in its budget this year approved $300,000 towards literacy, $120,000 for math coaches and $50,000 for performing arts. With the literacy report that came out this spring, Hackett said the math coaches will have to wait.

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"We need to focus on literacy," he said. "That may mean we have to hire more staff or buy curriculum material. We have a team working around curriculum. We'll be looking at the resources [the report] identified and then we'll see where we are."

As to how the $50,000 for performing arts will be spent, Hackett said that hasn't been decided yet, but he's leaning towards the McCall.

Although students can participate in a community theater program, Hackett said the schools wanted to add in-house opportunities.

"There's nothing at the middle school level," he said. "I think they could do some smaller productions, not like a fall or spring play, but it would give those kids at the middle school a way to participate."

Programming

The big change this year is finding a way to help ease kids and teachers into the education day, Hackett said, and that may mean getting rid of traditional homerooms.

"We want to give kids and teachers a breather," he said. "It's a social/emotional piece that's important. We're doing it at the middle school and elementary level and providing them with a block of time."

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Parents attend the School Committee meeting where the literacy report was presented. WINCHESTER NEWS/WINCAM PHOTO/NELL ESCOBAR COAKLEY

Hackett added the district is really focusing on growth at the elementary level when it comes to the literacy curriculum.

“It’s something we want to do well,” he said, adding that in the Fiscal Year 2026 budget he will be seeking more money for resources for literacy. “That’s where we’re going to be putting our time and energy, at the elementary level.”

Hackett added there’s nothing else that is more important.

“That’s the focus,” he said. “There’s no other major initiative. We’ll work on other curriculum areas, but the primary focus is on literature, from the district’s perspective.”

Winchester families looking for more information about the coming school year, can click here.

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The following was submitted by the Office of Sen. Jason Lewis: State Sen. Jason Lewis joined his colleagues in the Massachusetts Senate to pass legislation that protects residents from discrimination in the housing market as the Trump administration abandons its enforcement of the federal Fair Housing Act. Illegal discrimination continues

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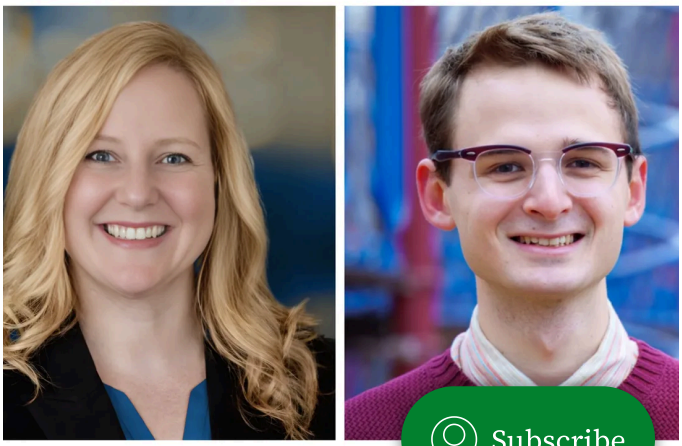

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FEATURES

'Chicago: Teen Edition' dances onto the Winchester High School stage

By Talia Ho | Correspondent Fame. Fortune. And all that jazz. This spring, Winchester High School presents "Chicago: Teen Edition," a bold musical that explores celebrity culture, media manipulation, and the cost of ambition. This iconic production is set in the 1920s. Performances will take place on March 13 and 14

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The following was submitted by the Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church: On Friday, March 13, beginning at 7:30 p.m., live in-person and live streamed from the stunning Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church, Winchester, 21 Church St., join in with Syldason, a duo concert featuring Sylvie Zakarian,

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